

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### **HINCHEY CALLS ON ADMINISTRATION TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON ELLENVILLE SCRAP CLEANUP**

ELLENVILLE - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today expressed concern that the Bush Administration may try to delay or derail the effort to have a contaminated scrap yard in Ellenville placed on the National Priority List (NPL) of hazardous sites. While Ellenville Scrap Iron and Metal was fully expected to be listed -a necessary step toward a federal cleanup- but the actions of the Bush Administration have raised doubt.

"It's very frustrating to have come this far and then find out the cleanup may be delayed or even not go forward at all," said Hinchey. "The investigation has confirmed contamination at a level to merit including Ellenville Scrap on the National Priority List of hazardous sites. That means people may be coming into contact with dangerous substances. But it's now questionable whether the listing will take place."

Hinchey was contacted in December 1997 by constituents who live near the scrap yard. Early in 1998 he repeatedly urged the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to more thoroughly test for contamination at the site. The DEC subsequently closed the scrap yard down and EPA conducted its own tests, finding significant contamination including PCBs and heavy metals.

In September 2001, EPA proposed that Ellenville Scrap Iron and Metal be included on the National Priority List (NPL) of hazardous sites. That proposal started a 60-day public comment period, followed by additional review by EPA. Considering the local public demand for remediating the site -and the concurrence of the state and local governments- the listing would normally be considered a foregone conclusion. But a slowdown in the pace of cleanups has greatly reduced that level of certainty.

In each of the last four years of the Clinton Administration about 86 cleanups were completed. In the first year of the Bush Administration, the number declined to 47. EPA predicts that number will decrease further still to 40 in each of the next two years. Meanwhile over 400 sites already on the NPL remain unremediated. Hinchey has joined Rep. Nita Lowey (NY-18) and 24 other Members of Congress in writing to EPA Administrator Christie Whitman expressing their concerns about the slowdown and requesting an explanation.

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"As I've been saying since the president proposed his first budget last year, many urgent needs are being sacrificed to pay for a tax cut that only benefits the wealthy," Hinchey added. "Frankly, though, when these cleanups can't be paid for by the specific polluter, they should be funded by a tax on the companies that handle toxins. Congress foolishly discontinued that tax in 1995 and has stubbornly refused to reinstate it. The result is that we get farther and farther away from the "polluter pays" principle and the burden falls increasingly on the taxpayer."

Hinchey suspects the Bush Administration, not wanting to see the number of sites on the NPL that have not been cleaned up grow larger, will delay new listings or simply decline to make them.

"There are children and families living with this hazardous site in their backyards," he said. I can think of very few things that should be higher priorities than removing this danger."